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SUBJECT: U.S.-SYRIA RELATIONS, SITUATION IN LEBANON,
ASSESSED BY PRO-REGIME ANALYST

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael Corbin, per 1.4 b,d.

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Describing U.S-Syria relations as at their lowest point ever, pro-regime foreign policy analyst Imad Shueibi, told A/DCM October 15 that anger and frustration in the regime towards the U.S. have reached new heights in the wake of the September 12 attack on the Embassy and what is perceived as USG lack of gratitude for the robust defense that security forces had provided. Despite those feelings, President Asad's sometimes harsh rhetoric, and Syria's confrontational posture, Asad really wants better relations with the U.S. but based on compromise and "give and take." On Lebanon, Shueibi predicted chaos in the coming few months, the fall of the Siniora government, and "a new majority" that reflects the post-war realities on the ground. Shueibi acknowledged that relations with Saudi Arabia were terrible but maintained that Syria-Egypt relations were on the mend. End Summary.

[12.](#) (C) BILATERAL RELATIONS AT LOWEST EBB EVER: Foreign affairs analyst Dr. Imad Shueibi, who is close to senior members of the Syrian regime, including in the security services, told A/DCM October 15 that relations with the U.S. are at their lowest point ever. Shueibi pointed to strong feelings of anger and frustration in the regime towards the U.S. that have reached new heights in the wake of the September 12 attack on the Embassy. Shueibi said that SARG leaders had expected more gratitude (i.e., a sustained diminishing of public criticism by the U.S.) for the robust defense Syrian security forces had provided the Embassy. Although the initial USG statements had expressed gratitude, the tone quickly shifted back to harsh criticism of Syria.

[13.](#) (C) Shueibi complained bitterly about a "secret channel" of Israeli-Syria contacts that the U.S. had had terminated about the time of the attack on the Embassy. He called such an approach short-sighted and mistaken. (Comment: Rumors are circulating on the diplomatic circuit that there had been recent secret contacts between Syria and Israel but that they had recently stopped.)

[14.](#) (C) MORATINOS VISIT A SHORT BREAK IN ISOLATION: Shueibi described the recent visit of Spanish FM Moratinos to Damascus as "a good break from the isolation," but discounted its longer-term importance, noting somewhat plaintively, "What Syria needs is better relations with the U.S." However, Syrian officials had no hope that relations could improve until there was a change of Administration in Washington. When asked if President Asad, given the harsh rhetoric in some of his recent speeches and Syria's

confrontational posture, really wanted better relations with the U.S., Shueibi expressed surprise at the question and insisted that the president wanted to improve relations, adding that that should have been clear even from the speeches, despite any criticisms Asad made. In his view, Asad was sending a message: Syria wanted better relations with the U.S. but "it is not a charity." Such an improvement needed to be based on compromise and "give and take."

15. (C) ROUGH SLEDDING IN LEBANON PREDICTED: On the situation in Lebanon, Shueibi predicted that there would be chaos there in the next two months because of "problems with the implementation" of UNSCR 1701. Shueibi insisted that the resolution had not been implemented fairly, with the emphasis on articles favorable to Israel and disregard for those that Syria considered important (he mentioned "article 18," which includes the usual boilerplate about a just and lasting peace in the region). In his view, the situation in Lebanon is unstable because "the results of the war don't accord with the situation on the ground," elaborating that they don't reflect the balance of power on the ground. He dropped truculent hints that "Hizballah will lose patience" and the Siniora government will not survive, since "a new majority" is needed, given post-war realities on the ground. On UNIFIL, he noted somewhat ominously "these forces won't stay if they are attacked."

16. (C) RELATIONS WITH SAUDI "TERRIBLE": Regarding Syria's relations with regional powers Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Shueibi acknowledged that they were bad. Relations with Egypt were still problematic but on the way to improvement, a trend reinforced by the recent visit of Omar Sulayman. With Saudi, relations were at their worst state in 40 years. Both countries would eventually have to acknowledge, however, that

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Syrian views had to be taken into account because its geography, among other factors, put it in the center of regional politics, especially regarding Lebanon. Saudi Arabia and Egypt were "on the periphery."

17. (C) COMMENT: This pro-regime foreign policy advisor's take on the importance of having better relations with the U.S. supports the view that Bashar is not merely pushing for confrontation with the U.S., despite his sometimes truculent rhetoric. The reality is more complicated and the recurring attention given to the U.S. and to the state of bilateral relations in his speeches and his recent set of interviews seems to reflect a desire for Syria to break out of its isolation and re-engage with the U.S.

CORBIN